

CLAIMS:

1. A method of providing visual information to a viewer, comprising the steps of:
 - (a) receiving at a receiver, a stream of video data transmitted from a video camera;
 - (b) receiving and monitoring the stream at a server connected to the receiver;
 - 5 (c) transmitting the stream from the server to one or more remote viewers over a communications network; and
 - (d) transmitting a snapshot image to one or more remote viewers in response to the detection of a characteristic in the stream.
- 10 2. A method according to claim 1 wherein the characteristic is a signal indicating that a snapshot request has been initiated at the video camera.
3. A method according to claim 2 wherein the initiation is by actuation of a button on the video camera.
4. A method according to claim 1 wherein the characteristic is an attribute of the visual content of the stream.
- 15 5. A method according to claim 4 wherein the attribute is the repetition of a substantially static image.
6. A method according to claim 5 wherein the substantially static image is detected by comparing a frame to a plurality of other frames in the stream, wherein the substantially static image is detected when the frame is similar to each of the other frames.
- 20 7. A method according to claim 6 wherein the frame was captured by the video camera after each of the other frames.
8. A method according to claim 7 further including the steps of:
 - including the frame in the plurality of other frames after it has been compared to the plurality of other frames; and
 - 25 removing a frame from the plurality of other frames.
9. A method according to claim 8 wherein the frame removed from the plurality of other frames is the earliest frame captured by the video camera.

10. A method according to any one of claims 6 to 9 wherein the frame is determined to be similar to another frame notwithstanding differences between the frames, where those differences are within a prescribed difference tolerance.
- 5 11. A method according to any one of claims 6 to 10 wherein the snapshot image transmitted to the viewer is an average frame calculated from the frame and each of the other frames.
12. A method according to any one of claims 6 to 11 further including the steps of:
comparing the frame to the most recently transmitted snapshot image; and
transmitting a further snapshot image only when the frame and the most recently
10 transmitted snapshot image are sufficiently different.
13. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 12 further including the step of storing each transmitted snapshot image at a client device of the viewer for retrieval and viewing.
14. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 10 wherein the resolution of the snapshot
15 image is higher than the resolution of the frames in the stream.
15. Computer program code comprising:
 - (a) instructions for receiving a stream of video data;
 - (b) instructions for transmitting the stream to one or more remote viewers over a communications network;
 - 20 (c) instructions for monitoring the stream; and
 - (d) instructions for transmitting a snapshot image to one or more remote viewers in response to the detection of a characteristic in the stream.
16. Computer program code according to claim 15 wherein the characteristic is a signal indicating that a snapshot request has been initiated at the video camera.
- 25 17. Computer program code according to claim 16 wherein the initiation is by activation of a button on the video camera.
18. Computer program code according to claim 15 wherein the characteristic is an attribute of the visual content of the stream.

19. Computer program code according to claim 18 wherein the attribute is the repetition of a substantially static image.
20. Computer program code according to claim 19 including instructions for detecting the substantially static image by comparing a frame to a plurality of other frames in the stream, wherein the substantially static image is detected when the first frame is similar to each of the other frames.
21. Computer program code according to claim 20 wherein the frame was captured by the video camera after each of the other frames.
22. Computer program code according to claim 21 further including:
 - instructions for including the first frame in the plurality of other frames after it has been compared to the plurality of other frames; and
 - instructions for removing a frame from the plurality of other frames.
23. Computer program code according to claim 22 wherein the frame removed from the plurality of other frames is the earliest frame captured by the video camera.
24. Computer program code according to any one of claims 20 to 23 including instructions for determining that the frame is similar to another frame notwithstanding differences between the frames where those differences are within a prescribed difference tolerance.
25. Computer program code according to any one of claims 20 to 24 including instructions for transmitting an average frame calculated from the frame and each of the other frames to the viewer as the snapshot image.
26. Computer program code according to any one of claims 15 to 25 including instructions for storing each transmitted snapshot image at a client device of the viewer for retrieval and viewing.
27. Computer program code according to any one of claims 15 to 26 including instructions for providing a snapshot image having a resolution higher than the resolution of the frames in the stream.